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ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE
TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND
PEOPLES
HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Forty-sixth year

Letter dated 12 November 1991 from the Permanent Representative of Portual to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to convey to you the text of a communiqué of the Government of Portugal on the human rights situation in East Timor.

I would be grateful if you would kindly arrange for the present letter and its annex to be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 19 and 98, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Fernando REINO
Ambassador of Portugal
Permanent Representative
to the United Nations

ANNEX

Communiqué dated 12 November 1991 by the Government of Portugal on the human rights situation in East Timor

1. News emanating from East Timor and confirmed by international press agencies (namely, from Jakarta) indicates that this morning a massacre occurred in the Territory causing dozens of dead and wounded. According to these reports, Indonesian armed forces opened fire on a crowd, estimated at about 1,000 people, gathered near the cemetery of Santa Cruz to honour Sebastião Rangel, a victim of the Motael church incident.

2. An official Indonesian source, quoted by Associated Press, confirmed that 40 people were killed during the incident.

3. Not even the presence in Dili of the Special Rapporteur on Torture of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights acted as a deterrent for this appalling action.

4. On 28 October a grave incident took place in the church of Motael, Dili, in which the action of Indonesian soldiers, in circumstances still to be fully explained, led to the death of two Timorese youths, Sebastião Rangel and Afonso Henriques, and to the arrest of dozens of others. The death of these two youths was confirmed by the newspaper Angkatan Bersenjata of the Indonesian Armed Forces. Amnesty International has launched an appeal asking for an immediate and impartial investigation of the circumstances that led to those deaths. Still unconfirmed reports indicate that other incidents have occurred in Maliana, Suai and Futumaca involving youths apparently seeking sanctuary in local churches. There is news of other recent deaths and arrests. Persecution of those suspected of organizing demonstrations during the now suspended parliamentary visit is also being reported.

5. The terrible precedents in the field of human rights in East Timor give us strong reason to fear that new violence and bloodshed may again take place at any moment. Last August, before the Special Committee on Decolonization, Amnesty International again alerted the United Nations to the fact that serious human rights violations keep being perpetrated in East Timor, seeing that practices such as short-term detentions accompanied by torture and ill-treatment of suspected opponents of Indonesian rule, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" had been intensified. At least 30 persons, and "possibly several more", that organization said, were killed by the Indonesian security forces in 1990 and in the first months of 1991 in apparent extrajudicial executions.

6. Portugal, for its part, has systematically denounced this situation, which ineluctably derives from the still unresolved question of the decolonization of East Timor, whose people has been deprived of exercising its right to self-determination, owing to the Republic of Indonesia's persistent illegal occupation, ever since its all-out military invasion of the Territory on 7 December 1975.

7. The Government of Portugal expresses its strongest condemnation of this new act of utmost brutality committed by the Indonesian Armed Forces against a defenceless civilian crowd, in disregard of basic principles of respect for human life.

8. It is time for the international community to heed the pressing calls for urgent action coming out of East Timor demanding that an end be put to this intolerable situation.

9. It will be recalled that one of the permanent objectives of Portuguese policy on East Timor, a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the administration of Portugal, illegally occupied by the Republic of Indonesia, has been, and will continue to be, the defence of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its inhabitants, denied during the occupation on a scale that is, proportionally, one of this century's gravest.

10. The denouncement of the situation in the Territory has been constant in several international instances, coming from countries, humanitarian organizations, petitioners from various quarters and from Timorese victims of human rights violations themselves. The United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights keep eloquent records in this regard. Institutions such as the European Parliament, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and the African Caribbean and Pacific States/European Community Consultative Assembly, to mention just a few, have lately conducted debates and have approved resolutions on the question of East Timor, which denounce the systematic human rights violations occurring in the Territory.

11. In spite of the difficulties that prevent access to what is happening in East Timor, namely, in the field of human rights, the information that reaches the outside, through various channels, allows for the conclusion that the general situation prevailing in the Territory has seriously worsened, especially in the last few weeks.

12. Against what was established in last June's agreement on the terms of reference of the Portuguese parliamentary visit to the Territory (which should have begun on 3 November), allowing for the freedom and spontaneity of contacts of the delegation with the population, Indonesian authorities conducted a campaign of terror and intimidation destined to prevent such contacts. The said campaign included the reinforcement of the security (omnipresent and infiltrated among the population) and military structures; surveillance and denoucement actions; forced attendance of the population at meetings during which any who meant to contact the parliamentary delegation were threatened; the intensification of questionings, tortures, arrests and "disappearances" of elements suspected of opposing Indonesian rule, and so on.

13. Dili's apostolic administrator himself, Monsignor Ximenes Belo, has courageously denounced this situation, revealing that the population was threatened with deadly reprisals after the departure of the delegation. Leaders of former Timorese politcial parties who had favoured the forced

annexation of East Timor by Indonesia have asked, like Monsignor Belo, for the presence of United Nations observers at the end of the parliamentary visit, so as to prevent such threats from being carried out.

14. It is unquestionable that all of this has led to a serious deterioration of the situation in the Territory, as well as to an atmosphere of great tension, which was generating fears, now confirmed, of the occurrence of a new wave of violations of human rights in East Timor.

15. A special responsibility in this regard is incumbent on the United Nations, whose basic principles and resolutions, including those of the Security Council, have been systematically violated by Indonesia, in blatant contempt for its authority.

16. Portugal thus appeals to all States and organizations to:

(a) Condemn this new massive violation of human rights against the East Timorese people, victim of a long-protracted denial of its basic human rights and freedoms, deriving from the continuing illegal occupation of their Territory by Indonesia, in disregard of the Charter of the United Nations and of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions;

(b) Bring pressure to bear on the Government of Indonesia to put an immediate end to its illegal occupation of East Timor and to the inhuman repression being waged against its people;

(c) Demand an impartial, thorough and internationally supervised investigation of this highly regrettable incident, and that access to the Territory be given to humanitarian non-governmental organizations;

(d) Monitor closely any developments in the field of human rights in East Timor, so as to prevent further bloodshed and violence from occurring.